



(U//FOUO) *Mission Discernment* - What's Tops on Our List?

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(S//SI) You walk into an office and *BAM!* Someone hands you a target ... you plod along obediently. Ever stop and wonder who decides what target you work on? NSA's missions are now being identified via a Governance process known as "**Mission Discernment**." You may be surprised to hear that, until this process was put into place, the US SIGINT System (USSS) often received varied and conflicting national-level requirements and had no way of pulling everything together.

(S//SI) Identifying NSA's missions at a strategic level is critical in order to efficiently allocate limited Agency resources. To discern NSA's mission -- Task #1, Responsibility #1 in the Governance framework -- SID leadership gathers input on Community requirements from SINIOs (SIGINT National Intelligence Officers) and from IMTs (Issue Management Teams) and takes recommendations on targets of interest from product line heads. SID leadership then submits these recommendations to DIRNSA for his review and signature.*

(S//SI) Agency leaders and analysts alike can view these missions, currently numbering 21, in a document called the USSS Strategic Mission List (SML).** The SML comprises targets categorized as "*Focus Areas*;" "*Accepted Risks*;" and "*Enduring Targets*," (currently, 5).*** It is reviewed monthly**** by SID Leadership and adjusted as necessary, thus providing high-level steerage to our nation's agile SIGINT System.

(S//SI) For those of you who prefer a chapter-and-verse definition of "**Mission Discernment**," here you are:

- "**Mission Discernment**" is the sorting, prioritization and evaluation of assigned SIGINT missions and overall intelligence requirements in concert with Presidential, DOD and DNI (Director of National Intelligence) guidance.

(U) Notes:

* (S//SI) You can learn more about the **Mission Discernment** process by viewing the [Discerning, Assessing, and Directing SIGINT Missions](#) briefing.

** (S//SI) Links to these lists appear in the "Missions List," appearing at the end of the [Mission Discernment document](#).

*** (S//SI) For more on the SML, see **SID today** article ["Is NSA Correctly Postured Against the Most Critical Missions?"](#)

**** (S//SI) See the most current - [Nov-Dec 2005](#) - SML.

(U//FOUO) Keep reading **SID today** for more on Governance!



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